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ABSTRACT

Utilizing data derived from survey questionnaires administered during 1968 to 427 white high school senior males, the following hypotheses were tested: (1) no class differentials exist with regard to the proportion in each class who place a high value on success; and (2) of those respondents who value success highly, a larger proportion of higher status youth will exhibit high levels of occupational and educational status projections than their lower status counterparts. The variables employed in data analysis were: (1) socioeconomic status, (2) occupational aspirations, (3) occupational expectations, (4) educational aspirations, (5) educational expectations, (6) success values index. Findings indicated: (1) there was a common value system relative to success which was operative across class lines; (2) lower class youth who valued success highly were more likely to exhibit lower-status expectations than their higher class counterparts but were not likely to exhibit corresponding differences in their aspirations. It was concluded that aspirations appear less indicative of an individual's value hierarchy because selection may come from other than "available" ends of action, while expectations denote a desired level of attainment realistically pursued. The data were collected in a study of nonmetropolitan youth from Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. (JC)

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COMMON VS. CLASS DIFFERENTIAL SUCCESS-VALUES: ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE FROM THE DEEP SOUTH*

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COMMON VS. CLASS DIFFERENTIAL SUCCESS-VALUES: ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE FROM THE DEEP SOUTH

The "success-theme" in American society has received much attention in sociological and psychological literature. Writers such as Merton (1968) and Williams (1970) tend to agree that this orientation continues to hold a dominant position in the American heirarchy of values. As portrayed by Merton, the "success-theme" is a culturally prescribed expectation regarded as appropriate for all individuals regardless of their positions in the social structure. It is a standard which emphasizes social ascent and affluence for all members of society, and its doctrine is disseminated extensively through every form of communication. This theme, which may be traced even furthur back than the advent of capitalism,[1] is not, however, necessarily assimilated uniformly by the various social strata. Merton contends that "[t]here is no swift and unbroken passage from the values expressed in the popular culture to the values by which men actually live." He continues in suggesting that we should not, however, assume that the two are totally unrelated simply because they are not identical and concludes that the problem is a matter for empirical inquiry.

Such research has resulted in a controversy over the issue of a common or class-differentiated value system in America and, consequently, a common or differential acceptance of the success-theme by the several social strata. The general question which arises is: Given that an individual indicates adherence to the culturally prescribed value of success, how is this orientation related, if at all, to his actions or to other attitudes which lead to his actions? In other words, if the "success-theme" is indeed a culturally prescribed value, then it should be pervasive throughout American society. On the other hand, differential perception of this value-orientation should result in variation of success striving attitudes and behaviors. The present study will provide empirical evidence from the Southern region of the U.S. in an attempt to answer two major questions inferred from the common vs. differential values controversy:

1) Are success-values pervasive throughout the social class structure?
2) Given the pervasiveness of the success-theme, does a class differential operate in the perception of the "success" concept?

Theoretical Importance of Values in Status Attainment Literature

The importance of values in choice situations (e.g. occupational choice) has been documented by the writings of such authors as Kluckhohn (1962) and Williams (1960) among others. It is from such theoretical perspectives that impetus for this research is initiated.

Kluckhohn, et al. (1962) provide the social sciences with a detailed definition of values which, to this author's knowledge, constitutes the most comprehensive formal definition of the concept to date. Equally advantageous, they attempt to draw a common ground between their own conception and "whatever established core of meaning may exist in familiar usages in ordinary language and scholarly terminology" (p. 395).[2] The formal definition of values offered by Kluckhohn et al. is:

> A value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distincitive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of

action (p. 395).[3]
For present purposes, Kluckhohn's explanation of the key work "selection" promises clarification of the tie between values and educational and occupational career choice. He points out that "as the observer sees behavior, the actor or actors have open in the observable world more than one mode, or means, or direction of action, each of which is objectively open (p. 402)." Thus, in the case of occupational choice, an individual may be compelled or influenced by personal or cultural values to "select" a particular occupational pursuit from among many that may be objectively open to him. Similarly, he may choose to pursue a college education instead of terminating his schooling upon high school graduation on the basis of such values.

Williams (1960), another prominent author in the area of values, offers some theoretical notions on the values and beliefs characterizing American society. Indicating a high degree of confidence in the supposition that values are "affective conceptions of the desirable", Williams suggests that values are involved in the selection of appropriate means to goals or ends of action. Since, as Kluckhohn posits, there are alternative means or courses of action in any behavioral situation, a balancing of alternatives i.e. a choice of one course of action over the others must occur. Thus, choices are seen by Williams to define values and their arrangement into heirarchies.

Williams goes on to outline the major value orientations of American society of which the most pertinent to this study is "achievement and success." He notes that all societies have standards of "personal excellence" upon which rewards to persons most closely emulating these standards depends. In American culture, standards of personal excellence run extraordinarily parallel to competitive occupational achievement, a value-orientation focusing upon the objective results of a person's action. Williams deems it necessary to distinguish between achievement and (economic) success; achievement denotes "valued accomplishments" whereas success emphasizes rewards. As a result of the difficulty encountered as one attempts to index achievement, Williams notes that success in American society tends to be symbolized by money or by the way one spends it. He posits that "[m]oney comes to be valued not only for itself and for the goods it will buy, but as symbolic evidence of success and, thereby, of personal worth" (p.421). Thus, success is perceived as a <u>reward</u> for <u>achievement</u> and both are conceived as desirable ends of action in American society.

Review of Empirical Literature

The empirical literature dealing with values and value-orientations is vast. Of moment to the present study, however, is that portion of research concerned with the pervasiveness of values and value-orientations throughout the various social strata; more specifically, the pervasiveness of those values oriented toward achievement or success.

In a study of respondents in a small upstate New York town, Mizruchi (1964) reveals several interesting findings concerning differentials in success-values among the various social strata. Most of the respondents in the study stressed the importance of getting ahead with slightly heavier emphasis coming from the lower classes. Additional analysis in the same study concerned the selection of success symbols among the respondents. Results indicated a tendency for

the lower classes to select material symbols and preferences such as home ownership over non-material symbols such as education. Mizruchi suggests that these findings lend support to Hyman's contention that lower-class individuals value highest those objectives and activities that contribute least to the attainment of success.

A study of high school seniors from a metropolitan area of Atlanta attempted to resolve the question of common values versus class differentiated values (Han, 1969). The analyses revealed that adolescents' occupational aspirations (or "socio-economic levels of wish" using the author's nomenclature) were not influenced by their perception of limitations or by their class background. However, the respondents' expectations for success were found to be directly related to the socioeconomic status of their families. Thus, the argument for common values is supported through the analysis of aspirations while class-differential theory is supported through the analysis of expectations.

Another approach to resolving the question of common or class-differential values comes out of the concept of the "lower-class value stretch" (Rodman, 1963). This concept is viewed as a mechanism through which potential strains faced by the lower-class person are minimized. Rodman points up the apparent contradictions found in the empirical literature on legitimacy and illegitimacy in the Caribbean. Some of the research findings indicate that the lower-class inhabitants of these areas view illegitimacy as deviant while other analyses imply that they do not. To resolve these contradictions, Rodman applies the value-stretch concept which maintains that the lower-class person develops an alternative set of values which help him adapt to his own circumstances, without actually abandoning the general values of society. For example, he posits that "[w]ithout abandoning the values placed upon success, such as high income and high educational and occupational attainment, [the lower-class person] stretches the values so that lesser degrees of success also become desirable" (p.209).

Methodology

The Data

The data for this study were collected in the second wave of a three-wave panel study of non-metropolitan youth in six Southern states - Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas. Survey questionnaires were administered during this 1968 wave to high school seniors. Of the projects total N of 1228 respondents 427 were white males making up the sample analyzed in the present study.

Operationalization of Variables

Several variables were utilized in the analysis of our data; socioeconomic status (SES), occupational aspirations (Occ. Asp.), occupational expectations (Occ. Exp.), educational aspirations (Ed. Asp.), educational expectations (Ed. Exp.), and success values index (SVI).

Socioeconomic Status-SES was operationalized by a question in the survey eliciting the respondent's father's occupation. Responses were coded according to the Modified Edwards Occupational Scale and collapsed into professional-managerial and working-class categories.

Occupational Aspirations- This variable was tapped by a question asking the respondent what occupation he would most desire if he were completely free to choose, disregarding any barriers to his attainment. Responses to this question were also coded according to the Modified Edwards Occupational Scale.

Occupational Expectation- This variable was elicited by a question asking the respondent to reveal what occupation he actually expected to attain. Coding of the responses was identical to coding utilized for the previously mentioned variables.

Educational Aspiration- Instrumentation of this variable consisted of a question asking the respondent how much education he desired. Responses were collapsed into high and low categories; "graduate from a college or university" and "continue studies after college or university graduation" being recoded as high aspirations and any lesser amount of schooling being regarded as low aspirations.

Educational Expectation- The data for this variable was collected by asking the respondent how much education he really expected. Responses were coded by the same guidelines used for Ed. Asp.

Success Value Index- This index was constructed from a question which asked the respondent to rank seven life goals in order of importance to him: (1) to have lots of free time to do what I want, (2) to get all the education I want, (3) to earn as much money as I can, (4) to get the job I want most, (5) to live in the kind of place I like best, (6) to have the kind of house, car, furniture, and other things like this I want, (7) to get married and raise a family. The SVI variable was operationalized by taking an average of the rank values given to the goals of "to get all the education I want" and "to get the job I want most". The resulting range of values was 1.5 to 6.5. Those respondents exhibiting an SVI score from 1.5 to 3.0 were placed in the high SVI level. All others were placed in the low category.

Analysis and Findings

Drawing upon implications of previous theoretical and empirical literature reviewed above, the present paper posits several hypotheses. Utilizing contingency table analysis with the Chi-square criterion of rejection, tests of these hypotheses are conducted.

As mentioned earlier, many writers tend to agree that the 'success-theme" is pervasive throughout the social class structure in American society i.e. members of all levels of society value success highly. Our first hypothesis, therefore, is that no class differentials exist with regard to the proportion in each class who place a high value upon success. Table 1 offers support for this hypothesis. The analysis reveals that high proportions of both low and

(Table 1 about here)

high status respondents (70% and 74% respectively) exhibit high SVI scores. The Chi-square value of .70 indicates that the four percentage-point difference between proportions is not statistically significant.

Rodman agrees that a common value system operates across social class lines. However, his concept of the lower-class value stretch suggests that although

the lower-class accept the more general societal values such as success, they "stretch" them such that lower-level goals also become desirable. We therefore suggest a second hypothesis to test the value-stretch thesis; of those respondents who value success highly, a larger proportion of higher-status youth will exhibit high levels of occupational and educational status projections than their lower-status counterparts. Table 2 offers a look at the results.

(Table 2 about here)

The table breaks down the youths' occupational and educational status projections into their aspirational and expectational components. Only those respondents exhibiting a high SVI score are included in the table and the percentage figures represent proportions of either high or low-status individuals who exhibited high levels of each status projection component. The analysis reveals that significantly larger proportions of higher-status youth exhibit high levels of educational and occupational expectations. However, differences in the proportions of either class aspiring to high levels of educational and occupational goals are by no means statistically significant. Thus, our hypothesis is supported when considering the expectations of the respondents but rejected when aspirational components of status projections are considered.

These findings are strikingly similar to those of Han's study of metropolitan high school seniors. His findings suggest that while high levels of aspiration are predominant throughout the class structure, expectational levels of the youth vary directly with the socioeconomic status of their family. Table 2 offers additional support for his findings.

Discussion

We have discussed two previous attempts to resolve the common versus differential values controversy (Rodman, 1963 and Han, 1969). The data presented in our analysis tend to support the contentions of both resolutions.

Rodman's lower-class value stretch thesis is maintained by our findings that although success is valued highly by members of both professional and working classes, the lower-class youth who value success highly are more likely to exhibit lower-status expectations than their higher-class counterparts. These findings suggest then, that youth from lower-status backgrounds are more apt to accept lesser degrees of educational and occupational attainment as desirable levels of success.

On the other hand, we found that the value-stretch theory was supported only by the expectational components of status projections. When aspirations were considered, we found no significant differences between proportions of either class who aspire to high occupational and educational statuses. Therefore, Han's contention that the controversy between common versus differential values may be at least partially resolved by clearly distinguishing between aspirations and expectations is also supported by our data.

Our analysis seems to suggest that the issue of common or differential value systems rests on the levels of abstraction and generality accorded the particular value in question. For example, the concept of success is indeed somewhat abstract and is commonly considered a general value of American society.

Equally as general, is the assumption that the legitimate means to the goal of success is education and the subsequent occupational attainment in which schooling supposedly results. It is contended that the more general and abstract the value, the more pervasive it will be throughout society. Thus, success and the means to its attainment tend to be valued highly in our culture. However, on a more concrete level, as Han points up, the definitions of acceptable levels of success may well vary with social class. Success is therefore conceived by the individual in terms of his own circumstances and realities. Thus, although the lower-class youth in our study valued success highly, the levels of success valued, as evidenced by their expectations, tended to be somewhat lower than the levels valued by adolescents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Differentials operate not in the acceptance of the success-theme but rather in the levels of achievement which consititute that success.

An important question which arises from our findings is: Why do class-differentials operate for adolescents' expectations and not for their aspirations? In an attempt to answer this question, we return to Kluckhohn's definition of values; conceptions of the desirable which influence selection from available modes, means, and ends of action. The keyword here is the term "available". By virtue of their operationalization, aspirations appear less indicative of an individual's value hierarchy than his expectations. As defined in this study, aspirations are the occupational or educatioal levels that the respondent would most desire if he were completely free to choose, disregarding any barriers to his attainment. Therefore, the field from which the adolescent selects includes many responses which are not realistically available. On the other hand, the expectation items impel the individual to consider any situational barrier to his attainment, thus restricting the field of choice to those responses which are objectively open to him. We suggest then, that while aspirations may be considered desirable ends of action, they are not goals toward which the individual actively strives. Therefore, values are not indicated by aspirations, since selection, in this case, may come from other than available ends of action. Expectations, however, denote a desired level of attainment realistically pursued by the respondent and therefore indicative of his valued levels of success. The present study, then, provides additional evidence for Rodman's value-stretch thesis in that while the lower-class respondents indicate acceptance of the culturally prescribed success-theme, their expectations suggest a lower-level perception of success than do those of their higher-status counterparts.

Table 1. RANKING OF SUCCESS VALUES BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF RESPONDENT

	SES			
	Low	High	X^2	Significance
High SVI	70% (204)	74% (144)	.70	.40
N=348				

Table 2. HIGH LEVELS OF STATUS PROJECTION ATTITUDES BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS FOR RESPONDENTS RANKING SUCCESS VALUES HIGH.

	SES			
	Low	High	X^2	Significance
High Occ. Asp. N=244	69% (140)	76% (104)	1.26	.26
High Occ. Exp. N=219	54% (125)	71% (94)	6.37	.01**
High Ed. Asp. N=247	61% (140)	69% (107)	1.27	.26
High Ed. Exp. N=248	48% (141)	64% (107)	5.17	.02**

FOOTNOTES

1. Merton quotes Weber's observation: "The impulse to aquisition, pursuit of gain, of money, of the greatest possible amount of money, has in itself nothing to do with capitalism [and, in the present instance, with the specifically American culture]. This impulse exists and has existed among waiters, physicians, coachmen, artists, prostitutes, dishonest officials, soldiers, nobles, crusaders, gamblers and beggars. One may say that it has been common to all sorts and conditions of men at all times and in all countries of the earth, wherever the objective possiblility of it is or has been given."

2. This commonality manifests itself in the large number of citations of this work to be found in the values literature.

3. For elaboration and explanation of the inclusion of each key term in this definition, see Kluckhohn, et al., 1960; pp. 394-403.

4. For a more detailed discussion, see Rodman, 1968; pp. 212-13.

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